

THE RESTRUCTURING OF BODY IN *THE TESTAMENT* BY MARGRET ATWOOD

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ABSTRACT

*The discourse on body expands in every new epoch, as the politics of culture has encircled the constant struggle of binaries. In the metaphysical tradition, the body has been explained as the embodiment of truth, moral values and cultural experiences. While in the contemporary era the chain of culture has entangled the body. The discursive and dialectical discourse propounded by Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze have made some attempts to unchain it. Nietzsche and Deleuze, reinvigorate the debate on the body by presenting that the body and consciousness, matter and spirit are one and the same. Deleuze's thought on body was inspired by Spinoza's philosophy of life, 'Nietzsche's idea of 'will to power'. Whereas Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Introduction* (1980) examines that how the body is being controlled by the utilitarian society; which is docile, used and transformed and hence the body is devoid of desire. Margret Atwood represents the dimensions and complexity of body in her Novels. Atwood's *The Testaments* (2019) sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) deals with the liberation of women's body. Every woman who is forced, punished and controlled breaks the harmony and believes in herself by liberating her bodies. The paper intends to examine the possibility of the liberation of women's body by celebrating it rather than by being burdened by it.*

KEYWORDS: Body, Will, Power, Desire, Consciousness & Politics of Culture

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INTRODUCTION

The discourse on body expands in every new epoch, as the politics of culture has encircled the constant struggle of binaries. In the metaphysical tradition, the body has been explained as the embodiment of truth, moral values and cultural experiences. While in the contemporary epoch the chain of culture which is entangled around the body tries to unchain through the influence of Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze. Nietzsche and Deleuze, tries to reinvigorate the debate on body by presenting that the body, consciousness, matter and spirit are one and the same. Deleuze who developed his body thought from the philosophy of Spinoza, 'life is a flow of desire', likewise Nietzsche's idea of 'will to power'. Whereas Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Introduction* (1980), examines that how the body is being controlled by the utilitarian society; which are docile, used and transformed and therefore the body is devoid of desire. Librating force which is taken place in the sequel of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996) by knitting the complex structures of past and then reviling the uncertain future through different events in *The Testaments*(2019). Every woman who was forced, punished and created breaks the harmony and believes in themselves by liberating their bodies. When the body enters into the stage of philosophical discourse the culture also plays the predominant role, as the body from time immemorial has been encircled by the tradition and hence, never been defined as natural, functional or desired body. In the metaphysical tradition, the body was explained as the embodiment of truth, moral values and cultural experience. Friedrich Nietzsche in the book *Beyond Good and Evil* (1989) expounds about 'nihilism' which means rejecting the worldly pleasures of body and earth, which is mainly seen in the fields of religion, metaphysics, transcendental consciousness and science. "Nietzsche believed that humanity has to get rid of

nihilism was taken up as the central project of his philosophical activity by Nietzsche. He also expressed his hope in the philosophers of the future who will bring new goals to human existence”(52). Philosophers during the time of Greeks have been debated about the metaphysical and morals of the body which existed in the pre-historical stage as tamed, sucked, humiliated, silenced and contained as the suppressed entity. Henceforth, the reclamation should change, as the body celebrates the contested site of flux, being concrete, sensual and material rather than being abstract, rational and spiritual. In the post-modern epoch the body is seen more weighing than the mind as it is viewed as more propelling force, whether it's about ethics, moral values or aesthetics in day to day life or the beautification of the body. Abey Koshy in the article “Reinvigorating the Body: A Critical Analysis of Agency in Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze” (2014) talks about the body according to different philosophers.

“Even the Darwinian kind of biologism, the most influential modern materialism lies far away from the bodily materialism of Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze who perceived body and consciousness, matter and spirit as one and the same. Spinoza who propounded psycho-physical parallelism is probably the only forerunner to such a thought in the history of philosophy. Deleuze who has developed his body thought from the philosophy of Spinoza has said that ‘life is a flow of desire’, and its parallel can be seen in Nietzsche’s idea of ‘the will to power’” (136).

There is an unresolved dualism in the body and consciousness, these spiritualists who move away from all the dispose of matter and body which remains valueless trash for them, after the relevance of material and spiritual. As consciousness is taken differently from the body because the reality lies beyond desires for the awakened soul. Body is seen as the prison for the soul and also as a hindrance for moving towards the functioning of consciousness. Nietzsche enters this debate to refute the traditional concepts of metaphysics, spiritual, soul immortality and divinity. He tends to develop a new philosophical thought on body. He gives an example from the text *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1969) “moral values are not something originated from transcendental archetypes or forms as Plato claimed, but the outcome of the type of food a person eats and the climatic condition of a land in which a person lives” (237). Thus, all the values, beliefs and thoughts developed in a human are the result of bodily origins. When the world started the humans were also part of natural animal beings, but eventually, due to the spiritual awakening, the human turned their way towards humanity which made their anthropocentric attitude more rational. The replacement of naturalistic-animal order of human carried many reasons such as divine power, consciousness and values acquired by spirituality. And Nietzsche viewed this part as the strong case of ‘nihilism’. Nietzsche explains this in the text *The Antichrist* (1990) that he wants to bring the human back into its original natural-animalistic form. He says “we no longer trace the origin of man in the spirit, in the divinity; we have place him back among the animals” (134). So, the basic attempt is made to bring the human back into the animalistic element of nature from humanism which is considered as the lord of universe. Nietzsche thought was staged into two forms of bodily discourse; one was phenomenological view which got the spectacles of body consciousness unlike transcendental consciousness and the second was of the view from poststructuralist that the body has a political sphere in the modern epoch which undertakes the investigation. This is to perceive that the body which is tamed, used and deformed in the modern culture is being restructured to carry out the task assigned to it. “Poststructuralist project is meant to unravel the techniques employed by the dominant powers to tame and organize the human body in different periods in history. Their project is to produce a genealogy of the body rather than providing simply a theory of the body like phenomenology does”(138). Nietzsche release new prospective which philosophers were unable to unwrap that the body can also exist devoid of spirituality which becomes the external factor to control its natural essence. The classical case by Aristotle who introduced about the external factor i.e. God (who is the unmoved mover and is the cause of the creation) controlling every

movement of the body and matter.

“Nietzsche is the first person in the history of thinking who showed that the body does not require any external mental substance for instigation of its movements and thoughts. With the announcement of the ‘death of God’ he was actually making the body free of external control of spiritual substances. He replaces it with a force that is an attribute of the body itself which is the ‘will to power’”(139).

With this discussion the responses enter with the Foucault’s idea drawn from the Nietzsche’s critique of nihilism, he asserts that from the historical period the body is something which is molded, tortured and reshaped by the dominant force of power. With slight disagreement with Nietzsche, Foucault explicate body as the human body shaped by culture which eventually goes through different changes either through physical torture or by the numerous discourses on it. In the article, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1984), “he does not speak of any bodily attribute or force that works from within the body that shapes its agency. Rather, the body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values” (83). Therefore, neither the psychological characters define the human nature nor the physiological movement shapes the body rather the discipline of the society creates the human body.

The discourse on body expanded with the further vindications of Gilles Deleuze who wrote *Anti Oedipus* with Felix Guattari which showcases the liberation of the body politics. Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ is substituted by the Deleuze and Guattari’s perception of ‘desire’ as the attribute of the body. Desire in the universal sense is being confined and blocked in the modern structured society. To free from the constraints of the culture they purposed the idea of ‘the body without organs’. Here the ‘organs’ symbolizes the cultural materialism and the societal tradition which binds the body into closed circle of organism. “In the view of Deleuze and Guattari human liberation largely depends on removing such organs to get back to a state in which desire becomes productive once again. Deleuzian thought of the body without organ can be seen as an endorsement of Nietzsche’s recognition of a pre historic, primordial, pre-cultural and natural body that is driven by the life affirmative ‘will to power’”(140).

Creation and recreation of the history, in which the body materialized either from the subjugation of the dominant power politics or by the discourses of various philosophers has imprinted which keeps adding whenever there are some changes in the cultural imprints. This genealogy not only encounters the impact stepped on the body culturally, but also takes part in the resistance against the dominant force of power of society and the imprisonment which shattered the minimal joy craved by the body. Foucault’s genealogical works such as *Discipline and Punishment* (1979), *The History of sexuality: An Introduction* (1980) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) examines that how the body is being controlled by the utilitarian society which are docile, used and transformed. “The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they investigate it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (25). These analyses are to give rise to the different disciplines whereas; in the cultural space the body and the desire are regulated in the controlled operation. With this the counter starts by the resistance of the body which is necessary to control the power it can either come from within or through the external force. These anti-life powers which are the repressive order of society like socio-cultural institution, police, state etc only disintegrate the body. Therefore, if the body can resist the domination it can only come from within, no external power can help to resist. As Nietzsche “has already shown that bodies are driven not by external spiritual principles but by its own internal force which is ‘will to power’”(142). Foucault neither agrees with the idea that the power doesn’t act as a force or essence of the body,

nor he think that the body has libidinal desire. Unlike Nietzsche, Foucault couldn't conceive that the body has the internal force that is 'will to power' or the internal sexual drive like libido. This can be seen through the Text *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1980), he explains that the drive is the product of power dominance, rather the biological instinct. He also sees the desire as the constructed material of the culture but not the trait of the body.

"Human body is portrayed as an object that is affected by the power of the discourses of sex. The sex is not an inner energy of the human bodies but is the product of the discourses of Christianity, medicine, psychoanalysis and other social sciences. Human being's desire for sex cannot be seen as an instinct, existed prior to the operation of those discourses. There is no sexuality for the body other than the presence of some anatomical elements, biological functions and sensations, which are discrete and never felt as a sexual instinct" (152).

The cultural theorist Herbert Marcuse in the text *Eros and Civilization* (1970) describes about the 'eros' rejecting the idea of Foucault about the libido, as he disapprove the fact that the contemporary civilization continues to suppress the erotic pleasure. According to him, the unconscious libidinal pleasure should be linked to make the renewed society where the human can be more creative and happy. In the pre-historical period where the bodies were natural-driven and were free from all the inscriptions but Foucault always visualize body with the cultural inscription engraved by the dominant power. He sees it as an organized entity rather the post-modern beliefs as body without organs. The libratory project is hard to draw on body because of his cultural deterministic thought, which requires the wiping of cultural imprints on the body by the power dominance of the society. Abey Koshy in the article "Reinvigorating the Body: A Critical Analysis of Agency in Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze" (2014) says "if history is a repeated struggle between various forces foe domination and the body always its product, it is doubtful if Foucault can effectively justify a scope for a political struggle" (144). Foucault draws a passive picture of body which does not have the resistance for the dominant power. He says in *The History of Sexuality* (1980), that every age has its own positive and negative regulations on the body. For instance, he speaks of the history of the body of the ancient Greek civilization where they had a very positive economy of pleasure. Greeks never saw body as the suppressive force to extract the labor power out of it rather in the modern epoch the body is seen as the object to extract the wealth.

"Although the notion of body and power employed by Foucault is a reformulation of Nietzsche's idea of the 'will to power' he fails to see the underlying possibility of resistance that could be developed from the body's internal power. This entitles us to claim that Nietzsche's genealogy goes beyond mere analysis of the techniques deployed by the reactive forces to produce subjectivities in different historical periods. His genealogy also unravels the subtle psychology of the repressive forces and the dynamics of their functioning"(146).

The two tasks is been suggested by Nietzsche's body politics. The first is to overpower the nihilistic history by creating a culture that allows the free-flow of bodily desires. The second is the self discovery of bodily instinct by each individual. This practice might be for short duration but it gives the possibility to exist between the negative social orders. "This practicing of the living of the bodily is what Nietzsche characterizes as the aesthetic dimension of existence"(150). Through the overflow of energy and superabundance of life the body enhances the site of desire. Nietzsche in the book *Will to Power* explains "art produces...an excess and overflow of blooming physicality into the world of images and desires...and it excites the animal functions through the images and desires of the intensified life. Further it is stated that art exercises the power of suggestion over the muscles and senses...it works tonically, increases strength and inflames desires of the body"(427).

The body is perceived as the desiring body for Deleuze and Guattari. As they put forward the idea of zero intensity of bodies, schizoanalysis introduces the idea of 'body without organs', which basically help the body to escape the regiments of power structures like culture, state, family and moral institution. "Body without organs is not a body that dismantles physical bodily parts or organs. Rather it is a metaphor used by Deleuze and Guattari for the body that removes the inscriptions and meanings drawn on the surface of it by the repressive human culture" (153). The bodies of different animals, plants and humans have created the lines of escape of their identities as the formation of their matters which passes through various directions are highly unstable. As explained in *Thousand Plateaus*,

"The body without organs causes intensities to pass: it produces and distributes them in a spatium that is itself intensive, lacking extension...it is non stratified, unformed, intense matter...that is why we treat the 'body without organ' as the full egg before extension of the organism and organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata..." (153).

Deleuze started as an experiment on the body to measure the intensity, which was devalued in the present civilization where body is only seen in the metaphysical or spiritual sense and hence, demystifies the natural instinct as love, sexuality and sensuality. Body has always been under the eye of objectification through political, social and philosophical discourses. "Through the schizoanalytical project of Deleuze and Guattari does not propose any foolproof means for the permanent liberation of the body, they throw more light into the possibility of a different life that affirms body and its forces" (156). Some form of organization of the body has to be admitted, as the cultural and social components cannot be entirely ribbed off.

Body having various dimensions and when it delves into the psychoanalysis it produces a different structure to discuss this structure Anup Dhar shares the article "The (Sexed) Body in Psychoanalysis: Between the Chiasma and Chasm" (2014) which explains the body through the three spectacles that is: "the Christian confessional flesh, the Cartesian understanding of mind/body and the medical understanding of the body" (166). In Christian structures the sins are closely related to the body rather the illegitimate relationships. The question arises as the body feels the tickling and titillations.

"In a word: we are witnessing the flesh being pinned to the body. Previously, the flesh, the sin of the flesh was above all breaking the rule of union. Now the sin of the flesh dwells within the body itself. One tracks down the sin of the flesh by questioning its different and its different sensory levels"(167).

The line moving towards the sexuality, as the concept is being deployed to present its own experience. This was born through flesh and instinct as the code of the carnal was always resided in the body and its pleasure. Jacques Lacan in the text *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (1985), explains body from 'real bodies' to the 'Real of Bodies', by seeing the body as "irreal (not unreal, not real in a naïve sense, but irreal- irreal as in-between real and unreal)" (174). In the Lacanian real the whole body is seen as the inassimilable taking the turns towards the fragmented corporeal experiences. There are three understanding of Lacanian Real.

- "1. Real before Language- Real as a priori- Real which exist before the area of symbolization and it is the letter or language which tend to kill the body, the body as the whole is real.
- 2. Real after Language- Real as the remainder of the process of symbolization, Real is what cannot be symbolized; hence the Real remains the inassimilable remainder, but this is a body that cannot be named; it only gestures towards an unnamed remainder or an unnamed excess, an excess that cannot be domesticated.

- 3. Real as the by-product (and not the leftover) of the process of symbolization; Real as that which is secreted out by the process of symbolization; Real as that which is repudiated in the process of the formation of the symbolic; hence the whole body or the body as a whole is not Real; instead, body parts emerge as Real, as foreclosed" (175).

This foreclosed contingent process of the Real is differently defined by Lacan by taking body in the Real ground of experience.

In the philosophical tradition, the most debated part remains the relationship with one's own self. But in many traditions, it's been seen that self is being projected separately than the body, which is often seen as the accidental part or problematic arena. As Spreekumar Nellikkappilly in the article "The Phenomenology of Body: Gadamer's Hermeneutic Analysis of Health and Illness" (2014) examines that the concept of body which is seen through the angle of phenomenology. It takes the journey "towards the understanding of the human reality-and for that matter any reality-begins with an understanding of bodily experiences and the phenomenon of embodiment" (199). Thus, the most observant point that remains at the stage is the existence of the soul, as we hardly have the experience of the body being living or just remained the subject of decay. Jean Paul Sartre in *Being And Nothingness* (1943) illustrates "this phenomenological worry by describing how a physician experiences her patient's body as in the midst of the world" (303). This can be screened through observing one's own body, as when we observe our body with its organs their vitality is seen in an ultrasonic screen. He adds that "it was much more my property than my being" (304). The evident difference between the body as a property, as a being and as a person took a structure which Sartre termed as "the being that is revealed to us in the typical midst of the world experiences is the being-for-others"(304).

Margret Atwood in *The Testaments* (2019), explains the Genealogical Archives, which gives the record of the relation of the surrogate with her child. "It's essential to record who is related to whom, both officially and in fact: due to the Handmaid system, a couple's child may not be biologically related to the elite mother or even to the official father, for a desperate Handmaid is likely to seek impregnation however she may. It is our business to inform ourselves, since incest must be prevented: there are enough Unbabies already" (35). This is an attempt to keep the record because the baby delivered by the Offred was Nicole which was sent out of the Gilead to be safe. In Gilead, every other women is worth of something or the other, although the culture is that of women but no one has the power of freedom but being suppressed by other women. This can be seen through the speech of the Aunt explaining the other women about her strength. "She said I was shirking my duty, and any girl who'd been gifted with a woman's body was obligated to offer this body up in holy sacrifice to God and for the glory of Gilead and mankind, and also to fulfill the function that such bodies had inherited from the moment of creation, and that was nature's law"(246). Women in the three novels have different characterization which helped them to evolve in new form by going through the journey of surrogacy. The surrogacy is not just the process helping the needy couple but metamorphosis of the women involved in surrogacy by realizing the importance being a woman and that of the child who is given price tag just coming after the womb. Especially Mala and Jamie Long reunite with the family that they crave for. These women had struggled not just for her life but also for the life they are carrying inside them.

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